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THE SOVIET UNION'S "NEW DEFENSIVE DOCTRINE" AND  
THE CHANGING FACE OF SOVIET STRATEGIC CULTURE

BY

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THE SOVIET UNION'S "NEW DEFENSIVE DOCTRINE" AND THE CHANGING  
FACE OF SOVIET STRATEGIC CULTURE

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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# THE SOVIET UNION'S 'NEW DEFENSIVE DOCTRINE' AND THE CHANGING FACE OF SOVIET STRATEGIC CULTURE

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Recent changes in the Soviet Union include modification of the country's military policy and structure. One component of this facet of the total restructuring effort includes a shift to a new defensive doctrine. This new defensive doctrine represents a radical change in Soviet military thought.<sup>1</sup>

This, and other changes, can have profound consequences for the United States. An examination of the "new defensive doctrine," its place in the overall restructuring of the Soviet Union, and how it reconciles with Soviet strategic culture reveals what we may expect to see in practice as this process unfolds.

Soviet strategic culture provides a useful framework to analyze the current debate within the Soviet Union regarding changes to military thought, specifically the new defensive doctrine. As a methodology, Soviet strategic culture offers an excellent frame of reference for examining the consequences of these important changes underway in the Soviet Union. However, this process of change will also act to modify this frame of reference itself. Consequently, we must not only understand the new defensive doctrine in

relationship to the current Soviet strategic culture, but also realize that the process of change will have a modifying effect on that culture. Soviet strategic culture is the result of years of socialization that has conditioned thought and behavior. <sup>2</sup> The professional members of the Soviet military are a product of their strategic culture. As we measure the effects of the new defensive doctrine on the Soviet military, we must also keep in mind that the means by which we measure the outcome are also changing. Therefore, it is necessary to not only understand the consequences of the new defensive doctrine on the Soviet military, but on Soviet strategic culture as well. Key components of Soviet strategic culture are inextricably linked to aggressive, deep, offensive operations. Changes to a purely defensive orientation are being proposed that strike at the very heart of Soviet strategic culture. The inevitable conflict between these two opposing ideas will result in changes to both. To borrow from Marx, it appears to be the classical dialectic, with a synthesis resulting from the clash between Soviet strategic culture and restructuring.

I intend to review Soviet strategic culture as it has developed up to now, review the arguments surrounding the new defensive policy, and identify some possible results from the interaction of these forces. I believe that the use of Soviet strategic culture as an analytical and



predictive tool still obtains. It continues to be a useful frame of reference in helping to understand the totality of the events taking place in the Soviet military and what is likely to emerge as these traumatic events are played out.

## ENDNOTES

1. Phillip A. Petersen and Notra Trulock III, "A 'New' Soviet Military Doctrine: Origins and implications," Soviet Studies Research Centre, Summer 1988, p.1.

2. David T. Twining, "Soviet Strategic Culture - The Missing Dimension," Intelligence and National Security, January 1989, p.180-181.

## CHAPTER II

### CONSTRUCT OF SOVIET STRATEGIC CULTURE

The notion of a strategic culture emanates from the concept that various nation-states produce clear national identities distinct from one another. These national identities have been developed through the combination of a shared historical, cultural, geographical and sociological process. This national identity provides some rationale as to why nations believe what they believe and behave the way they do. It therefore follows that a particular culture encourages a particular style or action.<sup>1</sup>

This culture and its corresponding unique relationship to military theory and practice allow us to examine the Soviet view of defense issues in light of this distinctive Soviet manner. While this does not provide an exact or perfectly determinist approach to predicting Soviet behavior, the use of Soviet strategic culture certainly aids in understanding what is taking place, why these changes are occurring, and underscore the degree of their effect.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, this comparative process will help us to

understand the components of the new, synthesized Soviet strategic culture.

Soviet strategic culture can be defined as the totality of the Soviet views on strategic affairs and military traditions represented by a unique operational style with specific characteristics. It is the summary of those attitudes and beliefs relating to the preparation for and conduct of war.<sup>3</sup>

Strategic culture is created over time by the combination of many factors. In my mind, there exist certain broad categories that produce the specific elements of a strategic culture. In the Soviet Union, these broad categories include:

- The impact of geography. The great size, global position and extremes of climate are the most significant features of the Soviet Union, and to a large degree the most important influence on this country's military perspective.<sup>4</sup>

- The influence of ideology. The social system of the USSR has been based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism. The Soviet military traditions have clearly identifiable roots in the Bolshevik revolution. The Soviet army of today continues to reflect the revolutionary ideal. The experience of the October revolution and the period immediately following caused the early Soviet state to learn very quickly that a powerful military machine was

essential to survival. This machine would be required to protect the nation from a hostile ring of capitalist foes bent on its destruction.<sup>5</sup>

The dominance of the Communist party. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union is the means by which this ideology is transmitted to the military. The dominant theme in the development and training of the officers of the Soviet military is political in nature. The importance of the Communist party cannot be overstated. This domination appears to be understood and accepted. The organization of the Communist party within the military, from the Main Political Directorate down to the Zampolits in the units ensures day-to-day influence upon military affairs. The military doctrine of the Soviet Union is official party policy, there can be no disagreement with its premises.<sup>6</sup> While the role of the Communist party appears to be weakening, the fact of its previous dominant influence will not be easily erased. The Soviet military has been conditioned by seventy years of Communist influence, it will not disappear overnight.

- The importance of history. The Soviets believe it is possible to analyze current military developments through the establishment of principles of military art that have been gleaned from historical study. History is not studied for its own sake, only for the lessons it has to

offer. As the most recent and soul-searing experience, the Great Patriotic War is key to this process. This war, more than all others, is viewed as an analytical instrument which can be used in a constant search for a better military organization. Historical analysis forms an important part of the data base upon which Soviet military science is established.<sup>7</sup> The Soviet military theoretician ascribes incredible importance and practical utility to the military-historical experience. Understanding Soviet military history and its importance aids in understanding the Soviet military mind.

The net effect of these four factors on Soviet society at large has been to place a military influence on virtually every facet of life. The effect on the military itself has been to accord it a special, preeminent place in society, at the expense of almost everything else and at great sacrifice of the people.

These fundamentally influencing factors have produced a culture with more specific characteristics that are useful in examining the tendencies Soviet military thought is to follow during this turbulent period. In his article, "Soviet Strategic Culture - The Missing Dimension", David Twining explicitly identifies these characteristics:

- An insatiable search for security, a quest in which the attainment of security in one geographic or substantive arena engenders insecurity in others. Domestic and international precautions

are largely motivated by the desperate experience of the Second World War, the single cultural experience shared by all Soviet peoples.

- A permanent struggle in world affairs, with conflict a normal condition, as an enduring lesson of Russian history. This expectation is supported by a distrust of foreign cultures, dialectical imperatives and the conviction that military weakness has been responsible for past invasions and defeats.
- A permanent struggle with states, because they or their ruling classes are hostile. States now socialist are secure only as long as Moscow's suzerainty is maintained. States now capitalist are subject to conversion by all means short of war because their threat cannot be otherwise attenuated. States considered "progressive" or "national democratic" will be watched and aided by Moscow's guardianship and example.
- A permanent struggle between classes. Change is inherent in the world revolutionary process, which is advance by legal and illegal communist parties, and proxy, surrogate elements. Classlessness - one large collective - is the only permanent solution given firm, central leadership from Moscow.
- A strong state, guided by resolute leaders, is required to mobilize the entire country and its resources to serve fundamental Soviet security interests.
- Others cannot be depended upon to guarantee Soviet security. The USSR will marshal, coordinate and command socialist forces. Moscow's primacy is essential to ensure the sanctity of Soviet soil.
- Continual sacrifice is necessary to preserve the state. Military forces guard the society which it serves and protects. Quantitative, qualitative, political and military-technical dimensions of military power must be sufficient to prevail over all possible enemies, separately or combined.

- The political utility of military power, where superiority at every escalatory levels required to attain the political aim of war through violent or, preferably, non-violent means. The greatest success and supreme achievement of military power is when , by its presence, readiness and capabilities, it need not be used to secure the political objective.
- Readiness to secure and protect the Soviet homeland and its interest. Military forces, despite their size and capability, are useless if they are not prepared to do their duty. Those in responsibility know best the nature and conduct of future war, with its requisite political and military-technical requirements.
- Victory is the goal aggressive offensive action makes possible. This is not narrow military victory, but the attainment of the political objective of war - the reason war was pursued and the goal which governed its conduct. All appropriate means and methods are sanctioned toward this conduct.<sup>8</sup>

As we use this notion of Soviet strategic culture as a lens through which we will view the transformation taking place within the Soviet military, it is important to understand that this "lens" is not fixed. Culture, by definition, is, inter alia, a process of history and experience. The experiences currently taking place are changing the totality of this culture, thus the lens through which we view it must be adjusted accordingly. The Soviet Union is acting in ways that represent a break from its traditional, dominant strategic culture.<sup>9</sup>

What we are seeing in the Soviet Union represents a significant historical event in itself which signals a radical shift in Soviet strategic culture. This does not



obviate its use as a tool for analysis. On the contrary, it provides the basis from which we can view the change; it helps us see the transformation as the Soviets see it. By understanding Soviet strategic culture we can better comprehend the monumental effort it is to overcome and change that culture. More importantly, by understanding the antecedent, we can more certainly preview what is to emerge from this catharsis.

#### ENDNOTES

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9. Gray, p.27.

### CHAPTER III

#### SOVIET MILITARY THOUGHT AND THE NEW DEFENSIVE DOCTRINE

Before delving directly into the evolution of the new defensive doctrine, it is imperative that the Soviet Union's unique concept of military thought be explained.

The Soviets have developed a strict theoretical model with precise terminology that governs military theory and the study of war. As previously mentioned, the dominant influence on Soviet military thought is Marxist-Leninist ideology as interpreted by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The most important principle of Marxism-Leninism dealing with military thought is that war is a continuation of policy, in Lenin's words, by violent means. Up until now, the Communist Party has been the final arbiter of what shapes Soviet military theory and practice.<sup>1</sup>

A sub-set of this system is the rigidly defined concept of Soviet military thought. The object of military thought is to determine the size and shape of the armed forces, and to establish what tactics, operational art, strategy, and

structure will enable those forces to win the types of wars that the Party expects.<sup>2</sup>

Soviet military doctrine is the official policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. As the highest level of Soviet military thought and official policy, it cannot be disagreed with in Soviet military writings. Soviet military doctrine has two sides: the political and military-technical. The political side is determined by the nation's political and military leadership based on principles of Marxism-Leninism, economics, technology, and world socio-political order.<sup>3</sup> The importance of the political side of military thought cannot be overstated. It is the political side which precedes the military-technical side and aids in understanding why the Soviets do some of the things that they do.

The military-technical side of military doctrine involves an examination of the theory of war and the development of the armed forces.<sup>3</sup> Together with the political side, the military-technical side of military doctrine provides the "what" and "why" of warfare as seen by the Soviets.

The "how" is called military science. In Soviet terms, military science is the "system of knowledge of the preparation for and conduct of armed conflict in the interests of the defense of the Soviet Union."<sup>5</sup> Unlike

doctrine, discussion and debate in this realm is encouraged, expected, and probably essential in the process of development. It is composed of five major categories: military organization and structure, military training and education, military economics, military history, and its most basic component - military art.<sup>6</sup>

Military art is also the most important component of military science. It seeks to describe the planning, conduct, and support of war at the three familiar levels of strategy, operational art, and tactics.<sup>7</sup>

The importance of such a fixed approach to the study of military theory becomes clear as we examine the changes taking place within the Soviet Union, specifically the development of the new defensive doctrine. The ongoing debate as to what this doctrine actually means and how it is going to be executed shifts from the political to the military-technical sides, and this distinction must be kept in mind.

One result of this bifurcated approach to military theory is a dialectical relationship between the two. Lenin himself believed that the military-technical and political aspects of war were inseparable, coordinated and influential upon another.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the U.S., a debate between the two aspects is expected and encouraged, not only within the military but among credible civilian defense experts as

well. The Soviets use their military journals, the media, and other writings as a forum for this type of debate. It appears to be a key process in the formulation of all aspects of military thought. The new defensive doctrine is currently undergoing this process of discussion and debate at various levels and by a wide range of actors.

### THE EVOLUTION OF THE NEW DEFENSIVE DOCTRINE

The evolution of the new defensive doctrine is the result of the confluence of two separate but parallel developments within the Soviet Union. The first, and by far the most widely publicized and well-known, emanates from General Secretary Gorbachev's dramatic efforts to restructure the country. The second and less well-known is an evolution in Soviet military thought that caused a shift in the philosophy regarding nuclear war and conventional war. While these developments seem to have started independently, they are now inextricably linked, and neither can be understood in isolation. Both are to have a profound and lasting impact on the construct of the Soviet strategic culture and the armed forces of the Soviet Union.

General Secretary Gorbachev's restructuring campaign began as a predominantly economic effort; however, it became clear that the economy could not be improved without

changes in military spending. Thus, the path to convergence of perestroika and the new defensive doctrine was established.

Gorbachev's actions and words define his agenda. At the beginning of his keynote address before the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev said "acceleration of the country's socio economic development is the key to all our problems," sending a clear signal that this was his most important objective.<sup>9</sup>

To achieve this objective Gorbachev realized that he needed a stable international environment, particularly good relations with the U.S. He realized that another arms race would sap the Soviet Union of the resources he would need to revitalize the economy. In attempting to achieve this stability he has repudiated Lenin's belief in the final physical battle between capitalism and communism. Gorbachev views this battle as suicidal and obsolete due to the availability of nuclear weapons. This conclusion was also reached by other military theorists, but as a result of a different process with different objectives in mind.<sup>10</sup>

In order to gain control of the defense agenda it was necessary to shift away from the centrality the military possessed in the Soviet economy. Gorbachev has succeeded in reversing the priorities to the point where economic

interests now dominate military ones. He was able to do this in part because of his belief in "reasonable sufficiency," i.e., the Soviet Union needs only those forces necessary for defense from an outside attack.<sup>11</sup>

The degree to which this reasonable sufficiency concept would be carried was manifested in Gorbachev's speech to the United Nations on 7 December 1988. In this startling address, he announced a unilateral withdrawal and disbanding of six tank divisions from East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary; reduction of remaining forces in the Warsaw Pact by 50,000 men and 5000 tanks; reorganization of Soviet forces into a clearly defensive structure; and, the reduction of the overall size of the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union by 500,000 men.<sup>12</sup>

While in fact the withdrawals and reductions have not gone precisely as Gorbachev said, significant actions have been taken to indicate that this is a serious effort and not purely a public relations ploy. This indicates that the political leadership of the Soviet Union has determined that a major shift in military thought is necessary and must be implemented. This decision has far-reaching implications for the armed forces of the Soviet Union in terms of how they view war, how they are organized, and ultimately, how they will fight.

## THE SECOND PATH: EVOLUTIONARY CHANGES IN MILITARY THOUGHT

There were also changes at work within the military themselves. While the outcome of this largely internal military process was not identical to the outcome produced by the need for systemic reform and restructuring, the conclusions approximated those that the General Secretary reached. The effect of restructuring on this internal military process was not only to accelerate it but to push it in a direction altogether different than the military imagined.

A key characteristic of Soviet strategic culture is the belief in offensive action. Soviet philosophy regarding both offense and defense is deeply rooted in the traditions and history of Soviet warfare. Lenin learned that offensive, aggressive action was necessary to achieve victory. In his "Letters From an Outsider," he includes the use of a preponderant force at the decisive moment and place, the importance of surprise, and resolute offensive actions as keys to military success.<sup>13</sup>

The Soviet civil war also provided much of the thought regarding both offensive and defensive warfare that remains up to the present. Specifically, the tenet that strategic offensive is the decisive force in achieving victory. These strategic offensives began with a counteroffensive which was



generally transformed into a general strategic offensive. Strategic defense, on the other hand, was used in order to win time to mobilize and prepare a counteroffensive. Other relevant principles learned in the civil war include: the creation of superiority in personnel and equipment; use of extensive maneuver by weakening secondary sectors; capitalizing on conflicts within the enemy camp; and use of trained reserves to attain the preponderance of force necessary to achieve success.<sup>14</sup>

By far the most important contributor to Soviet strategic culture regarding the power of the offense was the Great Patriotic War. During this massive conflict the Soviet Army developed the ability to control huge massed formations over tremendous distances in cohesive, long-term campaigns. The Soviets believe that their most important lesson from the entire war was how to conduct strategic offensive operations.<sup>15</sup>

Lessons regarding the defense were also learned and imbedded into the strategic culture. These lessons from Moscow, Stalingrad, and Kursk reinforced the previously held notions that the defense was a natural form of military operations, but a temporary one.<sup>16</sup> More current (1987) writings continue to point out the dominance of the offense over defense. The belief, also held by Lenin, that victory can be achieved only by decisive offensive action; that the

defense is a temporary, forced action - a means to the end of ultimately defeating the enemy, is still a very strong component of Soviet strategic culture.<sup>17</sup>

Nuclear weapons added another key ingredient to Soviet military thought. By 1962 the Soviets fully accepted that the next war would be thermonuclear. It would also be the decisive victory of communism over capitalism.<sup>18</sup>

Accordingly, the next period witnessed incredible growth within the Soviet armed forces. Strategic and theater nuclear forces were expanded and the Soviet Army was equipped to fight a mechanized, offensive war under nuclear conditions. It was clear that the Soviets intended to fight and win a nuclear war.<sup>19</sup>

In the late 1970's and early 1980's, about the same time that the Soviets believed they reached nuclear parity with the United States, Soviet military theorists began to question the validity of nuclear warfare. It is apparent that these theorists came to believe that given the destructiveness of nuclear weapons, nuclear war was unwinnable, and therefore could not be a logical continuation of political goals. The cause of socialism, as a political goal, could not be further advanced through nuclear war, thus making nuclear warfare largely irrelevant.<sup>20</sup>

This revolutionary shift in thought prompted the Soviet military to reexamine the possibility of striving to achieve conventional success. Marshal Ogarkov (then Chief of the General Staff) and Colonel-General Gareyev altered Soviet military science by expounding the idea of an independent conventional warfare option. This type of conventional warfare would rely on new conventional technologies, changes in force structure and operational art that would allow the successful prosecution of a nonnuclear war against the United States and NATO.<sup>21</sup>

Since Ogarkov, Gareyev and others put forth the conventional warfare option, this radical change in thought has had some time to mature within the military community. By 1987, the Defense Minister of the Soviet Union, Army General D.T. Yazov, had revisited the lessons learned from the Civil War and the Great Patriotic War, emphasizing the necessity of combining the defense with the offense.<sup>22</sup> Soviet thinkers had come to the realization that defensive actions were a necessary complement to offensive actions. Consequently, more attention to the defense became necessary in training, literature, and discussion.<sup>23</sup> A natural outgrowth of this analysis was a renewed emphasis on the defense, and the realization that the defense was one aspect of warfare that they had ignored for too long.

The understanding that the offense was the singularly most important aspect of military art had been severely modified. This represented a clear break with decades of Soviet military thought and represents one of the new significant influences on Soviet strategic culture.

It is essential to note that this transition in military art began before Gorbachev assumed power. He entered into the process before the transition was complete. However, Gorbachev's influence carried the transition into areas far beyond those envisioned by the military theorists and practitioners, the consequences of which remain to be fully appreciated.

The General Secretary fully accepted the notion that nuclear war was unwinnable and could not be used to achieve political or ideological goals.<sup>24</sup> This represented a significant revision of the Leninist doctrine associating war and politics. Gorbachev, unbound by Lenin's principles, had the unique freedom to carefully replace military security as the priority task for the nation. The political side of Soviet military doctrine had clearly changed. Gorbachev was able to integrate the necessary corresponding change in the military-technical side of military doctrine into an essential ingredient of his overall restructuring plan. With unimpeachable logic, the economic demands of the

nation replaced the military ones as the priority task and main effort in Soviet life.

Since Gorbachev did not appear to have military restructuring as a definite part of his program, the definition of his security policy evolved piecemeal over time. It is now fairly clear where this trend has gone, and it can be outlined as follows:

- War prevention, rather than war preparation, is a fundamental component of Soviet military thought.

- No war, especially nuclear war, can be considered a rational continuation of politics.

- Political means of enhancing security are more effective than military-technical means.

- Security is mutual; Soviet security cannot be enhanced by increasing other states' insecurity.

- Reasonable sufficiency should be the basis for the future development of the combat capabilities of the armed forces.

- Soviet military strategy should be based on non-provocative defense, not offensive capabilities and operations.<sup>25</sup>

The extent to which their political masters were to go stunned the Soviet military. Their initial reaction to this drastic shift in their culture would seem to indicate that they did not fully embrace the degree to which the new

defensive policy would take them. The announcement of the unilateral force reduction and withdrawal may have prompted the resignation of Marshal Akhromeyev, Chief of the General Staff. Akhromeyev had repeatedly and adamantly stated his opposition to any unilateral force reduction.<sup>26</sup>

The collision of Soviet strategic culture with a significant political force had occurred. The results of that collision are not yet fully apparent. The ultimate shape of the new defensive doctrine will be a product of the influence of the military, civilian defense experts, and the General Secretary's force of will.

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12. Committee on Armed Services, Status of the Soviet Union's Unilateral Force Reduction and Restructuring of its Forces, Report of the Delegation to West Berlin, East Germany, and the Soviet Union August 6-18 1989, 16 October 1989, p. 1.

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14. Ibid., p. 73.

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16. Gayvoronskiy, p.73.

17. Vasily G. Reznichenko, Tactics, translated in JPRS-UMA-88-008-L-2, 29 June 1988, p. 33.

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE NEW DEFENSIVE DOCTRINE: DEVELOPMENT AND DEBATE

In developing his concept of the new defensive doctrine, Gorbachev has turned to non-military professionals for new ideas.<sup>1</sup> These outside experts, particularly those in the Institute of the USA and Canada and the Institute for World Economy, have begun to play important roles as advisors to Gorbachev. The overall effect of these institutchiki has been to create competing centers of threat assessment and to reduce the military's ability to dominate security policy.<sup>2</sup> The institutchiki recognize that they have an influential role to play in the development of security policy. The military have been cool to changes proposed by these reformers, and while there is no open civil-military rift, the military have generally provided the only serious counterarguments to the proposals raised by the civilian experts.

Nevertheless, some tension has emerged between the various schools of thought as to what constitutes reasonable sufficiency and how the new defensive doctrine is to be implemented. For simplicity, these different schools may be categorized as traditionalists, moderates, and reformers.

The traditional perspective still strongly clings to the power of the offense as the only true means to preserve the nation. Largely composed of military officers, they



believe that the new defensive doctrine is really nothing new. In their view, the purpose of the armed forces is to defend Socialism. When threatened, the enemy would not only be stopped but annihilated through vigorous offensive action. Their concept of defensive-defense advocates the retention of a force capable of large-scale, offensive operation. They do not rule out the possibility of a preemptive attack should the country perceive a threat from the outside.<sup>3</sup> In light of the clear direction that the policy-makers are headed, this group is not very popular or vocal. The changes that have occurred in Eastern Europe have diminished not only their credibility but the true wherewithall to execute such offensive operations. They do remain important because they continue to represent a force within the military that must eventually modify their thinking. How quickly they change will influence the pace of reform within the military. Further, should the situation in the Soviet Union reverse itself dramatically, they could regain their influence.

The moderates are also predominantly military and ascribe to two similar but slightly differing views of what constitutes the new defensive doctrine. Both believe in reasonable sufficiency at least to the point that strategic parity is the decisive factor in preventing war, and that the current force levels are too high and should be reduced through negotiations. Both espouse the reorganization of

military forces to a more defensive structure and agree with the gains to be made from a better quality force. They continue to believe, however, that the offense continues to have a primary role in warfare.<sup>4</sup> The degree to which the offense is applied delineates these two moderate sub-groups.

The first sub-group is represented by what has been recently taught at the Voroshilov Academy as witnessed by the U.S. Congressional delegation that visited in October, 1989. This group accepts a "purely defensive" philosophy by allowing the aggressor to achieve a penetration. The penetration is then subjected to a counterattack followed by a powerful counteroffensive. This counteroffensive would not only eject the aggressor from the Soviet territory, but retain the capability to continue that counteroffensive into enemy territory.<sup>5</sup> Obviously, a force with the strength to defend, counterattack, and launch a counteroffensive is a potent one and certainly not "purely defensive." There is little difference between a counteroffensive and an offensive except timing.

The second sub-group of moderates are best typified by Defense Minister D.T. Yazov and General Lobov, First Deputy Chief of the General Staff, who support Gorbachev's efforts at restructuring the military. Yazov interprets the new defensive doctrine in military-technical terms as ensuring reliable protection of the state while ruling out the possibility of a preemptive attack or large-scale offensive

operations. Yazov, however, continues to worship at the altar of the offense in a vestigial sense. He believes that any invading enemy must be dealt a decisive offensive blow. At a minimum, this decisive operation is meant to eject the enemy from Soviet territory, but not to ultimately destroy the aggressor force wherever he may go.<sup>6</sup>

As a predominantly civilian group, the reformist movement is unique in the recent developments in Soviet military theory. Their position can best be described as a non-provocative defense. They maintain that both sides should reduce force levels to the point where neither has the capability to initiate offensive operations, only to defend.<sup>7</sup>

More dramatic is the notion that defensive actions are to be preferred to offensive ones. They have turned to the Battle of Kursk to justify their logic. Andrei Kokoshin and Viktor Larionov use Kursk to demonstrate the power of the defense. In an apparent analogy to today, they make the point that the Soviet military failed to pay adequate attention to strategic defense early in the war, with nearly catastrophic results. They also challenge the notion, most notably held by the traditionalists, that war should be transferred to the aggressor's territory at the outset. They believe that the Soviet Union is now in a position to create the conditions whereby the defense is superior to the

offense, ultimately strengthening security without relying on large scale conventional forces or nuclear weapons.<sup>8</sup>

Alexei Arbatov, another reformer, clearly ties together this school of thought's position in his article, "How Much Defense is Sufficient?" He maintains that the military must serve society and not be exempt from economic and political control. Since general nuclear, limited nuclear, and even a non-nuclear conventional war are truly unwinnable, war is not in the best interests of society. Therefore, the purpose of the armed forces is to prevent nuclear and conventional war. The main task of the armed forces is not to conduct strategic offensive operations in Europe or Asia, but to conduct defensive operations in order to frustrate the aggressor. He envisions no use of Soviet forces in regional or international conflicts as well. Strategy must change to prevent war by a reliable defense. This change must include a shift in emphasis from extensive means (large forces) to intensive means (smaller, defensively equipped forces). Arbatov also espouses the thought that security can be achieved more economically through political means than military ones.<sup>9</sup> The similarity between this argument and the General Secretary's agenda described earlier has not been lost on the reformers or on the members of the military.

The military professionals appear to be in a difficult position. They realize that they have much to gain from the

success of the restructuring program. They can envision a more efficient, better quality military that can take advantage of a stronger economy and improved technologies. They also appear to agree with the overall notion of reasonable sufficiency and have accepted the general concept of a more defensive orientation for military art.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, they have clearly rejected the academicians' view that this new defensive doctrine excludes the capability to conduct offensive operations.<sup>11</sup> They have been reluctant to make true changes in force structure, training emphasis, and training literature that would indicate any kind of support for the reformist position. Their culture and logic forces them to continue to argue for some offensive capability.<sup>12</sup>

The argument appears to continue to the present. The institutchiki have been attacked as non-professional and unable to perform the military analysis required in this turbulent situation. General Moiseyev goes so far to say that only the professional military can give proper advice on military-technical matters, with a strong implication that civilians should stop meddling in military issues. He even seems to reject the notion that political, economic, and diplomatic factors should influence force structure.<sup>13</sup> Strong statements such as these from a key military leader indicate the deep concern the military feel for this radical change in their culture.

Several observations are apparent from this debate. First, there is general agreement and support for the need to change the military-technical side of military doctrine. Second, this is a transitional period in Soviet military theory development where debate and discussion is expected and necessary, and will no doubt continue. The key difference in this debate from others is that previously the military essentially debated these issues among themselves within the constructs of their strategic culture. A new entity, the institutchiki are very much a critical factor in this process. Third, the military has lost its preeminence as the overriding force in determining the political and economic priorities of the Soviet Union. Finally, the military are being confronted with a dramatic change in their strategic culture. No doubt this organization, which appears to be so thoroughly imbued with the importance of history, tradition, doctrine, ideology, and structure, will undergo a difficult transformation.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Meyer, p.131.
2. P. Stephen Larrabee, "Gorbachev and the Soviet Military," Foreign Affairs, Summer 1988, p. 1012.
3. Dietrich and Hitchens, p.9.
4. Ibid., p.9-10.
5. Committee on Armed Services, p.9, Appendix 4.
6. Yazov, p.12.

7. Covington, p.42.
8. A. Kokoshin and V. Larionov, "The Battle of Kursk in Light of Contemporary Defense Doctrine," translated in JPRS-UWE-87-012, 19 November 1987, pp. 24-26.
9. A. Arbatov, "How Much Defense is Sufficient?" International Affairs, April, 1989, p.34-35.
10. Mark Kramer, "Soviet Military Policy," Current History, October, 1989, p. 352, and General of the Army Mikhail Moiseyev, "Reduction of Armed Forces and Armaments A Guarantee of Security For All," International Affairs, September 1989, pp. 4-9.
11. Yazov, p.10.
12. Larrabee, pp. 1023-1024.
13. George Weickhardt, "Moiseev versus Yazov: Backlash in the Armed Forces?" Report on the USSR 1 December 1989, pp. 6-7.

## CHAPTER V

### THE CHANGING FACE OF SOVIET STRATEGIC CULTURE

The political decision to adopt the principle of reasonable sufficiency and the new defensive doctrine have affected several aspects of Soviet strategic culture. The most obvious is the diminution of the offensive as the preeminent form of warfare. While it can be argued the military may have been working to achieve its own conclusions regarding conventional war and the importance of war prevention, they certainly did not expect to find themselves in the extreme position in which many now occupy. They are being forced to abandon a tenet of military thought --the offense-- that has dominated their notion of warfare for nearly fifty years. While it may be relatively easy for the senior leadership of the Soviet military, such as Yazov and Moiseyev, to publicly state their support for the new defensive doctrine, it is far more difficult to cause this doctrine to permeate the entire military establishment in thought and in practice.

The new defensive doctrine also strikes at the heart of two other closely related aspects of Soviet strategic culture. Conversion to a non-provocative defense denies the ability to gain escalatory superiority. Since escalatory superiority is no longer a goal, less conventional force structure is required to achieve security. Since a large



and expensive force structure is no longer necessary, the idea of sacrifice and hardship to sustain such a large force becomes less relevant. This represents a two-edged sword for the military. On one hand they clearly see the advantages to be gained from a stronger national economy, a more efficient industrial base, and a higher quality military force. This also represents a loss of a significant amount of influence within the government and a loss of prestige and respect with the Soviet people. The military themselves will have to expend a great deal of effort to counter the negative aspects of these trends while remaining supportive of the political agenda to restructure the Soviet economy.

Soviet strategic culture is undergoing a process of dramatic change to be sure, but it is not too early to plot the direction these changes will take and the effect on the Soviet armed forces.

In extrapolating what this course will be, several things become clear. The military has accepted the radical change in the political side of military thought. The duality of that concept and a clear understanding that party/government policy dominates political thought provide sufficient rationale for the military to buy into the whole idea of restructuring, reasonable sufficiency, and the need for a new defensive doctrine. The points of contention arise within the military-technical side of the discussion.

There is considerable tension within this process, not only between the military and the institutchiki, but within the military itself. It appears that the General Secretary himself has not yet decided as to how defensive he wants the military to become, and thus, this debate is likely to continue for some time. The military for their part still retain a significant influence regarding military-technical matters and remain somewhat a political force as well. The institutchiki will continue to press for an emasculated conventional force, capable only of defense with little or no offensive capability. The military will resist this effort, based on sound military logic and the culture they inherited and represent. They may win this argument as long as they can continue to justify a credible counterattack and counteroffensive force within budgetary constraints.<sup>1</sup>

### CONCLUSIONS

The most important conclusion of this study is that Soviet strategic culture remains an important analytical tool for understanding not only how and why the Soviets think militarily, but as a predictive device as well. This culture is now at a significant break-point in the continuing process of its development. To fully benefit from its analytical capability, its previous form must be understood just as thoroughly as the events that are transforming it.

The new defensive doctrine is but one indicator of the radical shift occurring in Soviet strategic culture. Many other factors are influencing this process of change as well. These other forces, such as arms control, the role of nationalism, the apparent dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, German reunification, the future role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union are but a few of the events that will forever change the face of Soviet strategic culture. These too must be considered and analyzed to fully envision possible outcomes for the Soviet military.

The realization of these changes will occur when action shifts from academic and theoretical debates to the armed forces of the Soviet Union as they begin to execute the new defensive doctrine. Their training exercises, training literature, force structure, and force positioning will give us clues as to how defensive they intend to become. Until this type of evidence is secured, we would be well-advised to pay attention to the various options the Soviets retain for their new defensive doctrine.

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1. Dietrich and Hitchens, p. 13.

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